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***Sessho-seki*, or the Death-Stone: A Mosaic of Biblical Quotations**

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1 Chamberlain and Noh

When I lived at Shiba some five-and-thirty years ago, I was very fond of attending the performances of the “*Nō*,” or medieval Japanese lyric dramas, which in some ways recall the dramatic art of ancient Greece. I even ventured to paraphrase a few of these delicate pieces in English verse — “The Robe of Feathers”, “The Death Stone”, and one or two more, which were published as long ago as 1880 in a volume entitled “The Classical Poetry of the Japanese.”¹

Basil Hall Chamberlain was born in Southsea, England in 1850. His father was a naval officer. His mother, a member of a renowned Scottish family, was so passionate about education that she endeavored to begin teaching her son Greek and Latin even while he was still in the womb. Unfortunately, when Chamberlain was only six years of age, she died young following the birth of two more sons.

After their mother passed, Chamberlain and his two brothers went to Versailles, France, to live with their mother's relatives. Although their father was opinionated about their education and the direction of their future careers, he left their care entirely up to their mother's relatives. This action cast a shadow over the relationship between Chamberlain and his father. Even after Chamberlain received news of his father's death in February 1877, four years after he had moved to Japan, it would be another three years before Chamberlain would return to Britain.

After earning a Baccalaureate, Chamberlain desired to attend Oxford University, which was also his father's wish. This meant returning permanently to Britain. However, his study plans were not to be realized. Once he returned to Britain, he followed his

father's instructions and worked at a bank, though he did not continue in that position for long. Around age twenty, Chamberlain's life was one of continuing setbacks. Without a place in either the academic or business world, he spent the beginning of this decade in the northern Mediterranean, Germany, and Switzerland, before finally heading towards Japan.

In May 1873, Chamberlain arrived in Yokohama. While the reason for his visit was unclear, he would continue to live in Japan for nearly forty years. After coming to Japan, he began work as an English teacher at a naval academy. At the same time, Chamberlain enthusiastically studied the Japanese language, including the classics, and presented his research findings within and outside of Japan. In 1880, his first work as a Japanologist was published in London, titled *The Classical Poetry of the Japanese*. Although a foreigner, he was hired in 1886 as a Japanese professor at Tokyo University. This indicated the extent to which he was recognized for his scholarly work and his linguistic abilities.

In this paper, I will consider the English translation of the Noh piece known as *Sessho-seki*, which appears within Chamberlain's *The Classical Poetry of the Japanese*. An aficionado of Noh, Chamberlain often watched productions, and translated a total of four different plays.² However, he did not state as to why he chose these four plays in particular, including *Sessho-seki*. Drawing upon the original Noh text, I will examine the background on Chamberlain's decision to include *Sessho-seki* in these texts by translating it as *the Death-Stone*.

2 From *Sessho-seki* to *the Death Stone*.

Based on Noh performance records from when Chamberlain arrived in Japan in May 1873 until the publication of *The Classical Poetry of the Japanese* in 1880, there were at most three occasions on which he would have been able to watch a performance of *Sessho-seki*. Of these, two performances were conducted in traditional formal style using costumes.³ Despite such limited experience, in 1876 Chamberlain managed to publish an English translation of *Sessho-seki* in Britain's *The Cornhill Magazine*. We can surmise that this play left a particularly strong impression on Chamberlain, given that he had attended a large range of different performances over a short few years after arriving in Japan.

The story is that a Buddhist priest, Gennō by name, while journeying across the desolate moor of Nasu, pauses to rest beneath this rock (*Sessho-seki*, or "Death-stone"). A spirit forthwith appears and warns him that, by remaining in this place, he is risking his life, for that not men only, but even birds and beasts perish if they do but touch it. The spirit and the chorus then recount to him in verse how once upon a time there lived a maiden, as leaned and accomplished as she was surpassingly beautiful,

whom the Emperor Toba-no-In took to himself as his favourite concubine, and for her sake neglected all the affairs of the state. At last one evening, on the occasion of a banquet at the Palace, the lights suddenly went out, and from the girl's body there darted forth a supernatural coruscation that illumined the whole scene, while the Mikado himself was struck down by disease. On the representations of the court magician, Abe-no-Yasunari, the vile witch — for the pretended beauty was evidently nothing better than a witch — was driven from the Imperial presence, and flew away through the air to the moor of Nasu, where she resumed her original shape, that of a fox. In the second act of the play, the spirit, appearing again, confesses to the god priest that itself is none other than the wraith of the witch whose story has just been told, and relates furthermore how after escaping from the Palace, she was hunted by dogs over the moor of Nasu, — the origin, as the chorus obligingly stops to explain, of the Japanese sport of *inu ou mono*, or “dog-hunting.” The priest then exorcises the evil spirit by means of Buddhistic incantations.⁴

The above text is taken from a section on Nasu in a book titled: *A Handbook for Travellers in Japan* (1913), published by Chamberlain along with his close friend and ally, W. B. Mason. Chamberlain explained that the *Sessho-seki* (the Death Stone) was located near Nasu, and was the setting for the Noh play of the same name. He also provided an outline of the play, in which his explanation was perfect. Although he did refer to a Noh recitation book when translating the performance,⁵ his deep understanding of the work offers us an indication of his interest in *Sessho-seki*.

While Chamberlain stated that the *Sessho-seki* was “delicate”, admittedly it is difficult to gain such an impression from the summary he provided. In fact, what is most notable was the dramatic change the lead character underwent, with the exorcism of her evil heart and her final conversion. Perhaps Chamberlain was strongly impacted by this story development.

If you ask Christians about the concept of conversion, they will be sure to recollect the story of the “Conversion of Paul the Apostle.” Although Chamberlain wrote in a letter to Lafcadio Hearn that he was an agnostic, within the same letter he praised the numerous positive influences that Christianity had on culture. He wrote: “Christianity gave us painting, it gave us music, it gave us glorious poetry, architecture that nothing else could have inspired [...]”⁶

Chamberlain's conflicted feelings with regards to faith would stay with him throughout his life.⁷ Yet, as a younger man who had found another “story of conversion” in a different land he had visited for the first time, and who still relied on a limited understanding of Japanese, did he not perhaps wish to ask about the meaning of such conversions, using a translation to pose the question to the Christian world? Was this ambitious motivation perhaps not the reason why he chose to translate *Sessho-seki* as *the Death-Stone*? Chamberlain asserts that: “the Bible may be considered from many points of view

apart from the strictly religious.” It was his view that when learning a foreign language, one could not separate it from the religious perspective that supports it. Hence, for Japanese learners of English, he translated many Psalms from the Old Testament into Japanese, presenting them in 1880, the same year as his publication of *The Classical Poetry of the Japanese*.⁸

“The Conversion of Paul the Apostle” is told in the middle of the “Acts of the Apostles” section within the New Testament of the Bible. As I believe there are fruitful semblances, I now wish to compare “The Acts of the Apostles”, along with a number of Gospels included in the New Testament, several of Paul’s letters, and a book of prophecy from the Old Testament known as “The Book of Isaiah”, to Chamberlain’s English translation of the *Sessho-seki*. I will use the King James version of the Bible to draw out the classical and poetical sides of Chamberlain’s translation. Furthermore, although Chamberlain’s translation is not divided into scenes, in following the development of the story, I shall divide the text into the nine sections marked [1] through to [9]. In the next chapter, I shall compare biblical chapters and verses thought to resemble parts of Chamberlain’s translation, examining them in the order of my comments.

3 Comparative Reading between *The Death-Stone* and the Bible

DRAMATIC PERSONÆ

Shite: The Spirit of the “Flawless Jewel Maiden.” as *Spirit*.⁹

Waki: The Buddhist Priest Gennō. as *Priest*.

Jiutai: The Chorus as *Chorus*.

[1] [*shidai*]¹⁰

Priest. What though the vapours of the fleeting scene
Obscure the view of pilgrims here below?
With heart intent on heav’nly things unseen,
I take my journey through this world of woe.

[*nanori*]¹¹

I am a priest, and Gennō is my name. [...] After sojourning in the province of Michinoku, I would now fain go up to the capital, and there pass the winter season of meditation. I have crossed the river Shirakaha, and have arrived at the moor of Nasu in the province of Shimotsuke.

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. [Acts 8:26]

The main theme for this chapter is “the troubles for the believers.” Philip is one of the disciples. In Greek, the name “Philip” stands for “a man who loves horses.” Gennō has now decided to go to *miyako*, the capital, located south from where he is currently staying.

【2】 N/A〔*mondō*〕¹²

【3】 〔*mondō*〕¹³

Spirit. Ah! rest not under the shadow of the stone!

Priest. What then? Is there any reason for not resting under the shadow of this stone?

Spirit. Yes; this is the Death-Stone of the moor
Of Nasu; and not men only, but birds even beasts
perish if they but touch it.

And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. [Matthew 8:28]

This narrative describes Jesus’s authority. In this chapter, Jesus heals two men possessed by demons. Chamberlain’s translation “not men only, but birds even beasts perish if they but touch it” traces the phrase “no man might pass by that way.” We know the stone is terribly dangerous.

The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. [Matthew 21:42, 44]

This parable is an allegory about quitting the faith and Divine judgment. The stone in this parable implies God sends His Son. Apart from the religious meanings, the phrase “whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken” recalls the death-stone.

Spirit. Seek not die! What! hast thou not heard tell
Of Nasu’s Death-Stone and its fatal spell?

I entreat thee draw not nigh unto it!

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen calling

upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

[Acts 7:57-8, 59]

This scene illustrates Stephen's death after he gave a speech to the people who were stoning him. In the biblical context, the word "stone" has several meanings, both positive and negative. Here, the stone is the means by which to kill a man, so we realize the link between the stone and death.

Priest. What is it, then, that maketh this stone so murderous?

Spirit. 'Tis that into it, in the olden time, entered
the spirit of her who was called the "Flawless Jewel
Maiden," concubine to the Emperor Toba.

[*kakeai*]¹⁴

Priest. Into this stone? on this far-distant road?
Methought the palace was the girl's abode.

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

[Isaiah 14:12]

In this verse, the theme is "The King of Babylon will fall." According to scholars, this verse has played an important part in the history of interpretation, being understood as an illustration of the theme of Lucifer, the fallen angel.¹⁵

In the dialogue in *the Death-Stone*, Gennō asked "Into this stone? on this far-distant road? Methought the palace was the girl's abode" suggests the fall of the triumph.

Priest. Thine appearance and thy language seem to
assure me that the tale is not unknown to thee.

Spirit. No! No! I know it but in outline.

And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

[Acts 21:37, 39]

This is the series of apologetic speeches made by Paul, once known as Saul, to the crowd. He was arrested. In *the Death-Stone*, the priest would like to further ask about the story, because he thought the woman knew more details based on her appearance and manner of speech. She did NOT appear to be a local girl.

(And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia,

yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

[Acts 22:2-3]

Again, Paul spoke to the crowd. The audience was surprised when they heard the arrested man (Paul) speak the authentic language in a great manner. Gennō was surprised as well, since the woman spoke in a very sophisticated manner and also appeared rather neat.

Spirit. Erst through the king's abode

Priest. Proudly the maiden storde,

Spirit. Now on this des'late road.

Priest. Her ghost doth dwell

Spirit. Broods o'er the fated land,

Priest. And ev'ry pilgrim band

Spirit. Falls 'neath her murd'rous hand,

Priest. Wielding the spell!¹⁶

... all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.

[Isaiah 14:9-11]

In the biblical sense, this verse teaches a taunt at Babylon's king who once reached his height of glory, after which it was drastically tarnished. In *the Death-Stone*, the maiden once walked proudly through the king's palace. However, now she (her ghost) is far from the palace and plotting dark deeds in a solitary land. Although the king in the Bible became weak after he lost his power, the maiden retained her evil power.

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

[Matthew 12:43, 45]

This is a parable about exorcism. Tamamono-mae, or the maiden in *the Death-Stone*, also tried to find a new place to rest and form a murderous plan.

... for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

[Isaiah 8:14-5]

This verse contains warnings to Isaiah. We should know the original message found in the verse. However, the two phrases, “a stone of stumbling” and “a rock of offence”, must be associated with the image of “the Death-Stone”, which sends us an evil sign.

[*ageuta*]¹⁷

- I. *Chorus.* The Death-Stone stands on Nasu's moor
 Through winter snows and summer heat;
 The moss grows grey upon its sides,
 But the foul demon haunts it yet.
 Chill blows the blast: the owl's sad choir
 Hoots hoarsely through the moaning pines;
 Among the low chrysanthemums
 The skulking fox, the jackal whines,
 As o'er the moor the autumn light declines.

... the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch place of rest. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever. The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. [Isaiah 34:9-10, 14]

These lines represent the judgment against the nations, especially judgment upon Edom. To envision the image of the desolate moor of Nasu, we might find some corresponding expressions between “through winter snows and summer heat”, “the owl's sad choir”, and “the skulking fox, the jackal whines” in *the Death-Stone*, and “it shall not be quenched night nor day ... for ever”, “none shall pass through it for ever and ever”, and “the screech owl also shall rest there” in the Book of Isaiah. In particular, the words “the screech owl” refer to a female vampire. This image definitely evokes an awful female figure, Tamamono-mae or “the Flawless Jewel Maiden.”

Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.

[Lamentations 5:18]

This is the cry to the Lord by the people. Actually, there is no special relationship with the image to the Noh play *the Death-Stone*. However, if we replace the word “Zion” with “Nasu” in this part of the song “the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it”, it would evoke the image of Tamamono-mae's proper figure revealed, striding around the death-stone in Nasu.

【4】〔kuri〕¹⁸

II. *Chorus.* Fair was the girl,-beyond expression fair;
But what her country, who her parents were,
None knew. And yet, as in her native place,
She proudly dwelt above the Cloudy Space,
〔sashi〕¹⁹
So sweetly deck'd by nature and by art,
The monarch's self soon clasp'd her to his heart.

Spirit. One day th' Imperial Majesty saw fit
To put to proof the Jewel Maiden's wit.

Chorus. Nor did she fail in ought: grave Buddhist lore,
Confucian classics of the days of yore,
Cipango's bards, the poets of Cathay,
And all the science the two realms display, —
She knew them all, nor did her answers fail
To tell of the music all the wondrous tale.

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. [Philippians 3:5-6]

This narrative is Paul's autobiography. Needless to say, there are no particular connections between the narrative in the scriptural letter and this Noh-play. However, as Paul stated, he was born in a traditional Jewish family, he once drove himself to pursue his purpose. Even though no one knew where Tamamono-mae was born, her outstanding talents allowed her to execute a demonic plan.

〔kuse〕²⁰

Chorus. Once the Mikado made a splendid feast
At the cool Summer Palace: ev'ry guest
That of accomplishments or wit could boast
Was bidden there, — a gay and brilliant host,
Like to the clouds, from out whose fleecy sphere
Th' imperial kindred, like the moon, shone clear.
But hark! what rumor mingles with the strains
Of liveliest music? See the heav'nly plains
Are wrapp'd in clouds and darkness! Not a star, —
The moon not risen yet: but from afar,
Heralded by the rusting of the show'r,

The wind comes howling through the festive bow'r;
The lanterns are blown out: "A light! a light!"
Cry all the courtiers in tumultuous fright.

... the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me. Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield ... And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground. [Isaiah 21:4-5, 9]

This scene illustrates the fall of Babylon. Most of all lines in "*kuse*" in *the Death-Stone* are so similar that we could be confused whether these lines refer to the destruction of Babylon or if Chamberlain borrowed some lines from Isaiah.

... the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. [Isaiah 13:10]

This verse also refers to the Divine judgment and the fall of Babylon. We should pay attention to the words "light" and "dark[ness]", as both have some allegorical images in the Bible. The word "light" implies Jesus, victory, and hope. On the other hand, "darkness" doubtlessly means a demon, destruction, and despair. In addition to the biblical image, we could possibly apply the following Chamberlain's rendering to this verse: "See the heav'nly plains / Are wrapp'd in clouds and darkness! Not a star, — / The moon not risen yet" to this verse?

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: [Matthew 24:29]

The narrative here shows the tribulation. The original message means the coming of the Son of Man. However, we should read the scene as disruption and panic at the splendid feast in the cool Summer Palace, or the *Seiryō-Den* in the capital.

And lo! From out the Jewel Maiden's frame
There's seen o' dart a weirdly lustrous flame!

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: [Acts 9:3]

Now we come to one of the most dramatic and impressive scenes in the New Testa-

ment: Saul's conversion. The story begins. His murderous and fanatical journey comes to an abrupt end. This also happens to "Tamamono-mae", or the Flawless Jewel Maiden.

Spirit. From that same hour the sov'reign monarch pin'd.
Chorus. From that same hour the sov'reign monarch pin'd.²¹

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? [Acts 9:4]

In dire disease, whose hidden cause to find
 The court magician cast his curious spell,
 And thus the fortune of the lots did tell:
 "'Tis none but she, great Emperor! without doubt
 That harlot is the culprit: cast her out!
 Expel the fiend, who, with insidious art,
 The state to ravage, captivates thy heart!"
 Thus spake the seer, and in an instant turn'd
 The monarch's love to hate.

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. [Matthew 10:1]

This chapter tells of the twelve disciples' mission. Here we learn one of their missions is to cast out unclean spirits from people. Apart from the biblical message, casting out the unclean spirit is the very function of the court magician. Therefore, Abe-no-Yasunari could be associated with the Jesus's twelve disciples. In addition, it is interesting to note that in this scene, Chamberlain reassigned Tamamono-mae's status from "Flawless Jewel Maiden" to "harlot", which holds an entirely different meaning. Also noteworthy, the status of Delilah in Milton's *Samson Agonistes* was altered from Samson's wife to "harlot" after she rendered Samson powerless and blind. It is likely speculation, yet I wonder if as an enthusiastic reader, Chamberlain might have borrowed the word "harlot" from *Samson Agonistes*.

And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

[Acts 9:10-3]

On the way to the conversion, Saul was baptized by Ananias. Like many Old Testament characters, Ananias does not hesitate to argue with the Lord. Abe-no-Yasunari does not hesitate to tell the emperor what we should do, either. The roles of Ananias and Yasunari are overlapping in the assignment.

The sorceress, spur'd,
Resumes her proper shape, and speeds away
To Nasu's moor, there swelling to this day.

All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it.

[Isaiah 40:6-7]

The basic idea for this chapter is the Lord's glory in Israel's liberation. Apart from that, Tamamono-mae lost her reputation and status. This is a kind of judgment on the unclean spirit.

[5] [*mondō*]²²

Priest. Thou that hast deigned to tell me this long
history, who may'st thou be?

Spirit. Wherefore any longer conceal it? The demon / that of old dwelt in
the breast of the "Flawless Jewel / Maiden," and that now inhabits
the / Death-Stone of the moor of Nasu is none other than myself.

Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.
[Acts 22:27-8]

This scene is Paul's defense before the Jerusalem Jews. I would not suggest there are some biblical echoes to *the Death-Stone*, but the dialogue scene can apply generally in the drama.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:
[Acts 26:1-2]

This is another encounter and dialogue scene: King Agrippa hears Paul. I would like to replace "the King Agrippa" with "the priest Gennō" as well as to replace "Paul" with "Tamamono-mae", or the Flawless Jewel Maiden. From here, everything will be disclosed.

Priest. Ah, well-a-day! Strange is it, but true, that the /soul sunk lowest in the depths of wickedness will rise / highest on the pinnacle of virtue. I will bestow on thee the priestly robe and begging–bowl.

But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” [Acts 9:15-7]

This reference and the one that follows are associated with Saul’s dramatic conversion and baptism. The word “begging–bowl” in Gennō’s offer is familiar to “my instrument” in the narrative, or “vessel” in “The Letter to the Romans” 9:22-4. You will see the “vessel” in “The Romans” is also quoted in the final scene in section 7.

But, prithee,
reveal thyself to mine eyes in thy proper shape.
Spirit. Alas! what shame is now my portion!

I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers,[...] And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. [Acts 22:3-4]

Again, a dramatic scene with Saul’s conversion and baptism.

In the garish light of day
I hide myself away,
Like pale Asama’s fires:
With the night I’ll come again,
Confess my guilt with pain
And new-born pure desires.

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; righteousness and true holiness. [Ephesians 4:22-4]

The message in this chapter basically means the unity in the Body. Believers can be reborn in the name of Christ. Tamamono-mae’s confession “my guilt with pain and new-born pure desires” corresponds with the expression “putting off the old man and putting on the true holiness.” The keywords are “old” and “new.” After having purification, Tamamono-mae will achieve “rebirth.”

Dark will be the night;
 But her red lustrous light
 Ne'er needs the moon.
 "Wait! fear not!" she cries,
 And from the hermit's eyes
 Fades 'neath the stone. [The spirit vanishes.]

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: [John 20:17]

This is the empty tomb scene that represents the Resurrection. Mary of Magdala visits the tomb in which Jesus is buried. We shall surmise that the spirit of Tamamono-mae warns "Wait! fear not!" resonates with what Jesus warns "Touch me not."

【6】 N/A

【7】 [*notto*]²³

Priest. 'Tis said of stocks and stones they have no/ soul. Yet what signifieth the text: "Herbs and trees, / stones and rocks, shall all enter into Nirvana", / save that from the beginning a divine essence dwells within / them? How much more, then, I bestow on this unhappy / creature the priestly robe and begging bowl, / must not her attainment of Nirvana be placed beyond / doubt? Wherefore, with offerings of flowers ...

All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:
 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.
 [Isaiah 40:6, 8]

We remember this verse referred to previously. Needless to say, these verses teach the Lord's glory in Israel's liberation and the promise of salvation in the Scripture. However, here we should focus on the words "grass" and "flower" in *the Death-Stone*.

(*Priest.*) Spirit of the Death-Stone, I conjure thee! What was / it in a former world that did cause thee to assume in / this so foul a shape?

Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord — Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." [Acts 9:17]

Again, we know that Saul has baptized by Ananias during his conversion. Ananias delivers

a gentle speech on behalf of Jesus to Saul. Gennō does the same with Tamamono-mae.

(*Priest.*) From this very hour shalt thou through mine intercessions
 obtain Nirvana,
 From this very hour shalt they gain for thee the virtues of a saint.
 Hear me! Hear me!
 [The stone is rent asunder and the Demon issues from it.]

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

[Romans 9:22-4]

In Paul's speech, we see that Paul loves not only Israel, but also the Gentiles. In his speech, the words "the vessels of mercy" echo Gennō's prayers.

[8] [*deha*]/[*noriji*]²⁴

Chorus. Oh, horror! Horror!
 The Death-Stone's rent in twain,
 And lo! The demon stands reveal'd!

[*kakeai*]²⁵

Priest. Strange! passing strange!
 The Death-Stone's rent in twain:
 O'er moor and field
 A lurid glare
 Burns fierce. There stands reveal'd
 A fox, — and yet again
 The phantom seems to wear
 The aspect of a maiden fair!

... the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; [Matthew 27:51-2]

This verse and the next quotation from the Gospel of Matthew represent the consequences following Jesus's crucifixion and death. Apart from the religious meaning, we can see the narrative "the temple was rent in twain" and "The Death-Stone's rent in twain", are almost identical expressions. Although "*something* is rent in twain" is merely a common expression, it should be emphasized that Chamberlain borrowed the phrase "rent in twain" in this narrative with the intent to efficiently convey the meaning.

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. [Matthew 28:2-4]

As you are aware, this is the narrative of the Resurrection of Jesus. Tamamono-mae also appears again as a proper figure before her true resurrection.

[*nanori-guri*]²⁶

Spirit. No more the mystery can be conceal'd.

I am she who first, in Ind, was the demon to whom / Prince Hanzoku paid homage at the murderous mound. / In Great Cathay I took the form of Hauzhi, consort of / the Emperor Iuwao; and at the court of Rising / Sun I became the "Flawless Jewel Maiden," concubine / to the Emperor Toba.

... and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. [...] and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. [Acts 26:10-1]

Again, King Agrippa hears Paul. We realize that some acts in the Noh-play repeat the same scene or narration. So far, Tamamono-mae tells a long story about threatening many people and countries.

They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the Lord, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land. [Isaiah 13:5]

Here, we find some oracles concerning Babylon. The verse "the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land" evokes the image of Tamamono-mae and her deeds.

[9] [*katari*]²⁷

Spirit. Intent on the destruction of the imperial line, I assume the shape of a fair maiden, whose presence caused the Jewel-body to languish in disease. Already was gloating over the thought of the monarch's death,

Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be

brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

[Isaiah 14:13-5]

This is the restoration of Israel with the downfall of the King of Babylon. It also traces the beginning and the end of Tamamono-mae's life. She once obtained great triumphs at the height of her success. However, as old saying goes "Clouds always follows the sunshine." Her successful "immoral" achievements turn to worse, or rather, to the worst.

(*Spirit.*) when the court magician, Abe-no-Yasunari, directed against me his powers of exorcism; he set up the many-coloured symbols § of the gods upon the altar, and gave them also into my hands:

Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. [Acts 26:12-4]

This is again the scene in which King Agrippa hears Paul. Paul explains how he has been dramatically changed by the holy light and voice.

[*chu-noriji*]²⁸

Spirit. With fervent zeal the great magician prays:

Chorus. With fervent zeal the great magician prays,
And ev'ry tone with anguish and amaze
O'erpow'rs the witch, who with convulsive grasp
The holy symbols of the gods doth clasp,

These signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; [Mark 16:17]

This narrative tells of the eleven disciples' commissioning to cast out evils following Jesus's Resurrection. Jesus's speech can be adopted to Gennō's prayer in *the Death-Stone*.

(*Chorus.*) And, heav'nward-soaring, flies o'er land and sea
To seek the shelter of this distant lea.

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there:

[Luke 11:24-6]

This is the scene in which the unclean spirit returns. See above.

[*chu-noriji*]²⁹

Spirit. Thereat the monarch issued his commands:

Chorus. Thereat the monarch issued his commands
To the two satraps of the neighb'ring lands:
"Dive out", spake he, "the fiend of Nasu's moor!"
And each true liege, to make his aim more sure,
For fivescore days on dogs his arrows tried,
For to the fox the dog is near allied:
May we not thus trace back to that command
The custom of dog-shooting in our land?

Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vine.

[Song of songs 2:15]

This verse is a love song about remembering woman's lover's visit. There is no strict relationship between the song and *the Death-Stone*. However, we can simply visualize how Tamamono-mae in her proper figure strolls about the death-stone like the fox in the verse.

Tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.

[Luke 13:32]

This is a call to repent. In this narrative, "that fox" refers to Herod the Great who tried to kill Jesus. In any case, the proclamation "I cast out devils" could be replaced with what the satrap shouts in *the Death-Stone*: "Dive out the fiend of Nasu's moor!"

(*Chorus.*) Then the two satraps, arm'd with bow and spear,
And myriad horsemen brought from far and near,
Beat all the moor, surround its evr'y part,
Swift fly the dogs, and swift the arrows fly
And, panting, stricken, I sink down and die.

I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years.

[Isaiah 38:10]

This verse is King Hezekiah's hymn of thanksgiving after he suffered a deadly illness. Hezekiah fears death extremely, but who loves to die? Even Tamamono-mae hates to be

killed and die.

Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. [Isaiah 38:12]

Hezekiah almost died, but fortunately, God heard Hezekiah's prayer and offered to help him. Tamamono-mae was never saved and died because the two satraps killed her with a swift arrow.

But yet my ghost (though, like the morning dew
'Twas wrapt away from grosser human view)
Ceas'd not to haunt this distant des'late moor,
and from the Death-Stone wield its murd'rous pow'r, —

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. [Matthew 12:43, 45]

You may remember this narrative about the return of the unclean spirit. Tamamono-mae once died and her ghost flew over to the new resting place, Nasu.

Till thou, great Buddha! send'st thy priest this way
To bid religion reassert her sway.
"I swear, O man of God! I swear," she cries,

So wilt thou recover me, and make me to live. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. [Isaiah 38:16-7]

This is the third time in which we refer to Hezekiah's hymn of thanksgiving. Tamamono-mae also cries with joy about how she appreciates the mercy of Buddha. It is interesting that Chamberlain translates her declaration as "O man of God!" not "Oh, Buddha!" In addition, Chamberlain left the word "God" in a capital letter that refers to the Christian term "G--." He did not use a delicate word to describe "god" as in a pagan god with a small letter "g--." This spelling suggests to us that Chamberlain had something in mind when he translated Tamamono-mae's cry.

I swear a solemn oath, that shall endure

Firm as the Death-Stone standing on the moor,
That from this hour I'm virtue's child alone!"
Thus spake the ghoul, and vanished 'neath the stone.

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. [...] be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. [Luke 15:21, 24]

The Parable of the Lost Son. This famous parable is regarded as “the Prodigal Son” and many artists have used this motif for their works. The son’s repentance “I have sinned against heaven” can adapt to what Tamamono-mae admits “for from this hour I’m virtue’s child alone!”

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. [Galatians 3:26, 28]

This verse is from one of Paul’s letter. In a religious sense, it illustrates the Law and the promise. Here, we should focus on the word “children (a child).” After being purified in mercy, Tamamono-mae has turned to a new-born man.

Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. [Isaiah 28:16]

Finally, we return to the word “stone”, that is entitled the Noh-play *Sessho-seki*, or *the Death-Stone*. Even though the original message found in the chapter in the Book of Isaiah suggests warnings to North Israel, we must pay attention and understand the exact meaning of the phrase “a tried stone.”

Chamberlain might have realized the stone concept in the drama, then borrowed how “the stone” underwent some scourging before being salvaged by God’s grace. Tamamono-mae once became “The stone which the builders (the Emperor or courtiers) rejected”, and threatened people everywhere, though eventually she was salvaged and converted.

* * *

Having read the text of the *Sessho-seki* alongside biblical quotes in this manner, we can now summarize the number of such comparisons that have been made.

【Number of Bible References】

Title \ Section	1	3	4	5	7	8	9	Total
Song of songs (OT)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Isaiah (OT)	0	4	3	0	1	1	5	14
Lamentations (OT)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Matthew(NT)	0	3	2	0	0	2	1	8
Mark(NT)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Luke(NT)	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
John(NT)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Acts(NT)	1	3	3	4	1	1	1	14
Romans(NT)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Galatians(NT)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Ephesians(NT)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Philippians(NT)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

* OT...Old Testament NT...New Testament

We anticipated that “The Acts of the Apostles” would represent the majority of texts from stories we examined, most of which were stories of conversion. However, in the above summary, we can see that there are an equal number of similarities to “The Book of Isaiah.” As this paper’s aim is not theological interpretation, I will avoid commenting on the value of “The Book of Isaiah” as a prophetic text. I suggest that Chamberlain paid attention to the harmony displayed between their forms as “poetry” and the message entrusted to the words themselves. I contend that while initially Chamberlain read the *Sessho-seki* as another “story of conversion”, over time he gradually began to recollect numerous scenes from “The Book of Isaiah”, overlaying them with the *Sessho-seki*. In one place, we can see a straightforward re-use of language. There is an expression concerning the return of Christ to the living, which reads: “the temple was rent in twain.” Meanwhile, when the Fox Witch reveals her true self in the *Sessho-seki*, and the stone breaks into two, Chamberlain wrote that: “the stone is rent in twain.” This degree of direct language re-use is admittedly uncommon. However when taken together with other quotations, there is more than enough material to suggest an overall similarity.

Interestingly, although indicating this degree of similarity, Chamberlain’s translation of the *Sessho-seki* as *The Death-Stone* includes no comments on similarities to or relationship with the Bible. As it happens, in *The Classical Poetry of the Japanese*, there is another translated Noh play titled *Nakamitsu*. In this play, Chamberlain provided the following translation for the words of Eshin Sōzu, who protects the character of Nakamitsu, who sacrificed his own child to protect his lord.

I would humbly supplicate thee to forgive one who was so loved that a man hath given his own son in exchange for him.³⁰

This translation came with the following footnote attached, noting the similarity to a sentence from a section of “The Gospel According to John”: “This sentence, which so strangely reminds one of John iii.16, is, like all the prose passages of these dramas, a literal rendering of the Japanese original.”³¹ Francisco Rivas Vicuña reached a similar conclusion to Chamberlain while creating a Spanish translation that utilized Chamberlain’s English translation.³² Individuals who were born, raised, and educated within Christian culture seem share this sensibility, which transcends the question of whether or not they are believers. If that is the case, then it is only reasonable to conclude that Chamberlain’s observation with respect to the biblical reading of *Nakamitsu* extends to *Sessho-seki* as well.

4 Conclusion

“We may be like children, playing with grand words not really understood at all.”³³

In conclusion, I would like to quote the letter from Chamberlain to Hearn. The phrase “grand words” refers to the Bible. Chamberlain insisted that Christianity was helpful for creating various kinds of art works, and championed the artistic source of Christianity against Hearn, who was highly critical of Christianity. However, Chamberlain had yet to admit that he was NEVER a Christian. Chamberlain fluctuated greatly among Christian beliefs from when he was very young: Church of England, Reform Church of France, and the Roman Catholic Church. He recognized that he enjoyed reading the Bible as literature, not as holy words. He must have known Ezekiel’s warnings, but he could stop listening when he wrote the letter to Hearn.

They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. [Ezekiel 33:31]

Apart from the religion, Chamberlain admitted that he could not help reading the Bible as a literature or art form.

In this paper, I did not examine his translation from a poetic viewpoint. I mainly compared the apparent similarities between his translation and the biblical quotations. Since he regarded the Noh plays as “the medieval Japanese lyric dramas”, Chamberlain’s Noh translations were carefully treated in the original meaning as well as the poetic form. For example, every line rhymes; some lines are alliterated. Chamberlain paid extreme attention to make his works “poetry.” I will review and evaluate Chamberlain as a “poet”

in the next opportunity, to introduce how John Donne (1572-1631), the poet and the preacher of James I, rhapsodized in a plea to read the Bible as literature in his “Expostulation 19: The Language of God”, for it is a good idea to borrow and apply the poets’ word when we discuss them.

My God, may I not say a literal God, thou art a figurative, a metaphorical God ... in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyage, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such curtains of allegories ... as all profane authors seem of the seed of the serpent creeps; thou art the dove that flies...³⁴

When Chamberlain first arrived in Japan, his first encounter with Noh plays was only the one about “the truth wins and the evils falls.” It was the very common theme across the world. However, fallen evils are not just defeated then die; they can also survive. More succinctly, evils can be reborn as true man. The play has some didactic elements of the conversion that resonated with Chamberlain.

In *the Death-Stone*, what Tamamono-mae insists are “new-born pure desires” refers to “re-birth”, in other words, “conversion.” In addition, regarding the word “conversion”, her before and after figure could be traced to Paul, the apostle.

It appears that Chamberlain somehow saw himself as Paul, the apostle, who was born in a foreign country and once called by a different name, Saul. In the Bible, Paul suddenly changed his name from Saul after he put off the old man and put on true holiness. As a resident of France during his teenage years, Chamberlain once failed to firmly settle in Britain, his birth country. His sentimental journey drove him to come to Japan, where he successfully found a position and a place to live. This illustrates that Chamberlain could also put off his old man and put on true life. The name Saul means the king in Hebrew. It is interesting to know that Chamberlain’s name “Basil” refers to king in Greek. His pseudonym “Ohdō” stands for “the king” in Japanese. We might suggest that by viewing the Noh-play *Sessho-seki* early in his twenties, Chamberlain was drawn to his new life in Japan.

Notes

1. Sasaki, 1911, preface with the Japanese translation.
2. The rest of two pieces including are: *Kantan*, entitled *Life is a Dream* and *Nakamitsu* (no English title).
3. Kurata, 1994, pp52, 61-2. If Chamberlain went to see the Noh plays only at *Kongō Noh Theatre* in Iikura in Shiba which was close from the house where Chamberlain lived then he could watch

Sesshoki twice on the 11th of November 1874 and the 11th of September 1875. The latter experience certainly stimulated Chamberlain and had him to translate it into English and published at the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1876.

4. Chamberlain and Mason, 1907, rev.1913, p 215.
5. Chamberlain, 1880, Preface. vi-vii.
6. Letters from Basil Hall Chamberlain to Lafcadio Hearn., pp7-11, 1936.
7. According to the diary written by Sir Ernest Satow, Chamberlain was baptized into the Catholic Church on the Christmas Eve in 1898. Ruxton, *Sir Ernst Satow's Diary*, 2003, p323.
8. "Suggestions for a Japanese Rendering of the Psalms." *Transactions of The Asiatic Society of Japan*. Vol.VIII, 1880 (reprtd. 1964), p285
9. *Shite* appears a local girl in the first part and the ghost of "Tamamono-mae" in the second part.
10. Poetic song. All these kind of English staging and performing definitions of Noh plays basically follow the definitions by Bethe, Monica and Richard Emmert, "*Aoinoue*." *Noh performance guide*. 1997
11. Name announcement.
12. Dialogue. A dialogue between *Ai* and *Waki*. *Ai* is performed by Kyōgen actor. Generally, *Ai*'s parts are omitted in the *Utai-bon*, or the Noh texts. That's why sections 2 and 6 are referred "N/A."
13. Dialogue.
14. Exchange between *Shite* and *Waki*.
15. Norton, *Oxford Bible Commentary*., p450.
16. This exchange [*kakeai*] between *Shite* and *Waki* originally opens by *Waki*. However, Chamberlain made some mistakes with assignments.

This exchange part should be as follows —

Priest. Erst through the king's abode
Priest. Proudly the maiden storde,
Spirit. Now on this des'late road.
Priest. Her ghost doth dwell
Spirit. Broods o'er the fated land,
Priest. And ev'ry pilgrim band
Priest. Falls 'neath her murd'rous hand,
Spirit. Wielding the spell!

Therefore, the first two underlined lines are for the Priest (*Waki*) and the last underlined two lines must be amended as above.

17. High-pitched song.
18. Ornate song.
19. Recitation.
20. Central narration by chorus.
21. According to the original text, this line is sung only by *Shite*. No repetition by *Chorus*.
22. Dialogue.
23. Prayer rhythm music to introduce *Waki*'s incantations.

24. “*deha*” is the entrance music for *Shite*. “*noriji*” is the whole-match rhythm. narrative poetry
25. Exchange.
26. Ornate name-announcing song.
27. Narrative by *Shite*
28. Half-match rhythm by *Shite* and *Ji* (Chorus). Quasi-verse. Dynamic mode. Matched rhythm in half-matched style. Danced struggle.
29. *ditto*.
30. Chamberlain, *Nakamitsu*., in 1880, p182.
31. Chamberlain, 1880, p182, footnotes.
32. Francisco Rivas Vicuña., 1919.
33. Letters from Basil Hall Chamberlain to Lafcadio Hearn., pp7-11, 1936.
34. Abrams, M. H. eds. *The Norton anthology of English literature.5th ed.*, 1986, p1108.

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